

## **BACKGROUND**

On August 5, while investigating the Gold King Mine in Colorado, the EPA and State Division of Reclamation Mining and Safety triggered a large release of mine wastewater into Cement Creek. The EPA is working closely with responders and local and state officials to monitor water contaminated by the release. The release's path flows through three of the EPA's regions (Region 8 (Colorado/Utah & Southern Ute Tribe); Region 6 (New Mexico), and Region 9 (Navajo Nation). The EPA has activated its Emergency Operations System to ensure coordination among its regions, laboratories and national program offices in Washington, D.C. The EPA is closely coordinating with the officials in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Southern Ute Tribe and Navajo Nation.

For the latest information and photos visit: <http://www2.epa.gov/region8/gold-king-mine-release-emergency-response#updates>

### **August 10 Update**

EPA Region 8 has deployed a large response team to Durango and Silverton, Colorado and to several locations in New Mexico, Utah and the Navajo Reservation to coordinate with affected states, tribes and communities on various response activities and address impacts associated with the Gold King mine wastewater release.

EPA's primary objectives include working with federal, state, tribal and local authorities to make sure that people continue to have access to safe drinking water, to ensure appropriate precautions are in place for recreational use and contact with river water, to evaluate impacts to aquatic life and fish populations, and stop the flow of contaminated water into the watershed at the Gold King Mine site.

Aerial and ground reconnaissance indicates that the plume associated with the Gold King Mine release has dissipated downstream and there is no leading edge of contamination observable in downstream sections of the San Juan River or Lake Powell.

EPA has also taken steps to capture and treat the discharge at the Gold King mine, addressing the risk of additional downstream impacts. EPA has constructed four ponds at the mine site and is treating water by lowering acidity levels and removing dissolved metals. This system is discharging treated water to Cement Creek at levels cleaner (higher pH and lower levels of metals) than pre-event background conditions in the creek. Over the next several days, EPA will make upgrades to the system to ensure its continued operation.

EPA is collecting and assessing water quality from the Animas and San Juan Rivers daily. Over the next several days, we will be jointly evaluating data and information with partners to determine when access to the Animas and San Juan Rivers will be restored for activities and uses such as rafting, fishing, irrigation, and drinking water. EPA, tribal, state and local officials are coordinating these decisions based on sampling data, risk screening levels, and other related factors. We do not anticipate any reopening decisions until at least Friday, August 14. The timing of these decisions could vary among local, state and tribal governments based on local conditions and by uses. Until notified otherwise, people should continue to abide by existing closures.

The assessment of impacts to wildlife and fish populations is ongoing. To date we have seen no

indication of widespread fish mortality in the Animas or San Juan. Fish cages placed directly in the Animas River by the State of Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife for two days indicate one mortality out of 108 fish tested. The State will be evaluating those and other ecological impacts with partners as we move forward. EPA is also working with the New Mexico Department of Game Fish and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to investigate reports of wildlife covered with yellow sludge.

## **Additional Information**

### **EPA resources dedicated to the response**

EPA has deployed ten On Scene Coordinators in Silverton, Durango and Farmington, New Mexico. Water quality experts and several technicians and contractors will respond to the discharge as it reaches communities in New Mexico. Two Public Information Officers (PIOs) are also on site in Durango at the Joint Information Center (JIC). In the EPA's regional office in Denver, there are 21 employees and one contractor providing support services to the response. Several incident management team positions were deployed to Durango today. Two Community Involvement Coordinators (CICs) were deployed to Farmington yesterday and met with local Navajo Chapter officials and hosted public meetings. The CICs will also partner with Navajo Nation EPA (NNEPA) and Navajo Department of Public Safety to ensure comprehensive outreach to all affected Navajo Chapters. The EPA has tapped into several contracting mechanisms to provide support for the response, which includes water quality sampling, drinking water and agricultural water distribution as well as construction and maintenance of the water treatment ponds.

## **Claims Process**

EPA is committed to taking responsibility for the discharge and impacts to affected communities. Detailed instructions and links to electronic forms was provided in the August 9, 2015, update.

Beginning on Tuesday, August 11, 2015, claimants may submit signed electronic versions of Standard Form 95 to the EPA for the Gold King Mine Release via e-mail at [R8\\_GKM\\_Claims@epa.gov](mailto:R8_GKM_Claims@epa.gov).

Although the EPA's regulations state that the EPA has 6 months to resolve a claim, the Agency will make every effort to respond to Gold King Mine release claims as soon as possible. Claims must be presented to the EPA within two years after the claim accrues.

The downward trend in water quality concentrations for metals continues for the sites sampled. Cement Creek 14th Street Bridge, only had one sampling event, so a trend could not be developed. The Animas River is an open water source and not considered potable until it has been properly treated.

Washing with soap and water after contact with the river water is a sound public health practice to minimize exposure to the metals, and also any bacteria that maybe present in the untreated river water. Anyone who feels illness as a result of exposure to metals or pathogenic organisms in the river water should contact their local health care provider.

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) recommends that additional monitoring should be conducted until the river returns to pre-release levels. If local health care providers have questions they can contact the ATSDR Regional Office at 303-312-7013. ATSDR's Regional Office can arrange a consultation between the health care provider and ATSDR physician.

Additional information about exposure with metals at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/substances/index.asp>

### **Wildlife Rehabilitation**

At 7 pm on Sunday, Aug 10, New Mexico Environment Secretary notified EPA that Alexa Sandoval from NM Department of Game and Fish needed help responding to reports of wildlife covered with yellow sludge. EPA immediately connected NM Fish & Game with Barry Forsythe, US Fish & Wildlife Service. NM Fish & Game is sending one biologist and two game wardens to assess the situation today and will follow up with USFWS. The USFWS has requested EPA contract with a wildlife rehabilitator to assist with cleaning any animals. USFWS will provide capture and oversight of the operations for the state.